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## A SCHOOLMASTER'S VIEW OF COMPULSORY MILITARY TRAINING <sup>1</sup>

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I AM very anxious, in this discussion, to mind my own business. My business is that of a schoolmaster. In so far, then, as the proposal of universal military training involves a change in the purposes and methods of the schools, I am concerned about it. I do not intend, if I can help it, to discuss the issue of "preparedness". You may think it advisable or inadvisable that this nation prepare for war. But in either case there is a fair question which confronts you—a question of equal interest to both sides—viz., "Is the proposal of universal compulsory military training a good one as a matter of educational policy?"

What sort of education our young people need depends of course upon the kind of young people they are. In the recent discussions of military training as well as in other discussions, I have heard some very uncomplimentary descriptions of the younger generation. Some of our older people speak as if by some strange caprice of chance or Providence, a plague had come down upon us. It is not this time a plague of locusts or of rats, but rather a plague of brats. Men seem to be asking, "Whence came they, these children who will not obey? What has destroyed the discipline of the world? Children nowadays do nothing as they are told to do; they do nothing properly, nothing with precision or orderliness; they are not at all like us, their parents and elders; how came they here to plague and terrify us?"

And it is from such complaints as this that, so far as I have been able to observe, the educational argument for compulsory military service is mainly derived. "Turn these disobedient

<sup>1</sup>Address at the evening meeting of the Academy of Political Science on May 18, 1916.

brats over to the drill-master," men are saying; "let him bring them into order and give them the virtues they so sorely need." But so far, at least, the argument does not seem to me convincing. It has too much the appearance of a "patent remedy" and too little the quality of the careful study of the disease. If one regards afflictions as "plagues", as inexplicable strokes of ill-fortune, one may treat them in this summary fashion. But surely the better way is to treat them as matters of cause and effect. If our children do not obey, why do they not? What has made them so unlike ourselves? It may be that if we can discover the cause of the disease we may likewise discern a remedy. It is practically certain that we shall not discover a remedy until we do know the cause.

Now the outstanding fact in the situation is that these children are "ours". They are our flesh and blood, our spirit. Our families have moulded and shaped them; the society which we are has developed and influenced them. They are what they are chiefly because of us. As against the conditions which created us, the conditions which create them differ in only one essential respect. The climate differs little; the soil is much the same; the only really important difference is that we had wiser and better parents than they. It would seem well, therefore, that we examine ourselves before prescribing a remedy. And the real issue appears, I think, in the remedy which has been proposed. The trouble is not apparently that children will not obey, for it is assumed that they will obey the drill-master. The complaint is that they will not obey *us*. And that of course admits of another explanation quite different from the one we have been giving. What is there in us that fails to command respect and obedience? Why is it that before us a younger generation does not yield its will and acknowledge its masters? In my own opinion, the greater part of the mystery lies here. We as a generation have become somewhat uncertain in our attitude, in our grip on life. We wish to be obeyed, but we do not know just what to command. And our children feel that uncertainty in us. And just because we are not quite sure what to command we are all the more determined that we shall be obeyed. Whether it be

in the home, the church, the state, the business, we find our opinions changing, our points of view shaken. And as a result of it all there comes the rather hysterical tension between the two groups, the one demanding instant obedience and conformity, the other feeling instinctively that those who give the commands are not sure of their wisdom, do not really expect or wish that they will be obeyed.

Now if this be really the source of our trouble, it is obvious that there is no quick and ready solution of the problem. Only as our grip on life becomes firmer, only as we work out a clearer and saner view of human values and procedures, will the ordinary relationship of old and young be reestablished. It will take a long time to do that and meanwhile we must labor at the task and wait for its completion.

But I fear that I am not after all minding my own business. Let me now hurry back and discuss directly this proposal that the drillmaster shall do for the teacher what the teacher has not been able to do for himself.

With many features of the proposal I find myself in hearty sympathy. I believe in discipline, in order, in obedience to what is worthy of it. And I am much attracted by the promise of proper physical development which the proposal offers. And again, the plan appeals to me because it involves "compulsion", gives us a required study. As against the scheme of election, it seems to me of vast importance that all our young people should be required to take certain common elements of training. But, on the other hand, there is room for choice by teachers as between required studies, and I am not at all convinced that this proposed choice is a wise one. May I state to you the questions which a schoolmaster would ask if such a requirement were proposed to him?

The plan is that all our young men shall be trained for military service. It may be presumed that this training is to be well given, that the young men will be in some important degree ready for military service when the training has been acquired. This would mean ultimately that all our young men of sufficient health and vigor would be available for use in the army in time of need. It has been estimated that it would

render available a force of 8,000,000 or 10,000,000 men between the ages of 18 and 30. Now the first question which a schoolmaster would ask in the face of this suggestion is "Do you need an army of this size; is it a requisite of your military policy that you should have so many men as this available for service?" And I think he would say further, "If you do need such an army, you might to advantage take this necessity as a basis for educational procedure; if you do not need such an army, you could not possibly establish a successful scheme of instruction upon it." It would not be a very promising venture to require attendance at theological schools if there were to be no churches in which ministers might practise their art. Medical schools would, I think, lose something of their force and charm if there were no diseases in the human form. And in the same way, to attempt to build an educational procedure upon the creation of an army which by hypothesis is not needed or is not believed to be needed would in my opinion be folly and would end in futility. It would be to build teaching on fiction, and fictions are not so good material for the purpose as is truth.

In order to make sure of minding my own business, I ought to keep my statement in the hypothetical form. If you need such an army, you can teach by means of it; if you don't, you can't. But I have had much opportunity for asking experts on the subject whether or not such an army is needed and almost without exception they have answered in the negative. The opinion of the country must be in some measure represented by the bill just now passing through Congress and that bill is measuring not in terms of millions but of hundreds of thousands. And so again I say that practically speaking, compulsory military training would be a lamentable failure as an educational procedure if it attempted to train up an army the need of which is not recognized by the people whose children are to be trained.

The argument I have tried to state is so easily misunderstood that I should like the privilege of restating it in another form.

Under what conditions of a school or college course may a

given subject be made compulsory? It seems to me that two conditions must be met. It must be clear first that the course gives something which is essential to the purpose of the school or college and second that the same value can not be secured in any other subject with equal success. I wonder if available evidence shows that military training does, in our American life, give better results in terms of obedience, discipline, precision, the sense of order and of obligation, than does non-military training. Are the graduates of our military schools better boys than those who come from other schools? As against that suggestion I would put in evidence the statement that apparently the overwhelming majority of our schoolmasters have been opposed to military teaching. Are the graduates of the state colleges which, under the Morrill Act, have long had military training, better men and citizens than those of other colleges? As against that it is worthy of note that prior to the war at least other colleges which were free to choose had not deemed it wise to follow the lead of their sister institutions which were giving such training under compulsion. Are our soldiers and sailors better men, better citizens, in the ordinary relationships of life than are other men? I would not deny it, but I should hesitate to found a universal scheme of training upon it.

And, on the other hand, will not other subjects give the desired training as well as does the discipline of the soldier? Is it not possible to demand obedience in the classroom in English, to insist upon precision and order in mathematics, to require subordination of the individual to a common purpose in any classroom? If not, then I think the advocate of military training will find himself in a dilemma. Are we to understand that the virtues in question are to be practised under the direction of the drillmaster two or three hours a week or four or five weeks in the summer, but that for the remainder of the week or of the year they are to be lacking or ignored altogether? If the virtues in question can not be practised in other fields, then there is no value in getting them from the military exercise; if they can be practised in other fields, then there is no need of giving military training in order to secure

them. The plain truth is that there is not one of the virtues under discussion which can not by proper teaching be as well developed in connection with the teaching of other subjects as under the guise of military training. If those subjects are not giving the virtues as well as we have a right to expect, then they are not properly taught. But the remedy for that is not the supplementing of bad teaching by good; it is the substituting of good teaching for bad in the field of those subjects which, for their own value, are chosen as proper parts of a school curriculum.

We arrive at the same conclusion in another way if we examine to see under what conditions military training has apparently given the virtues for which we seek. If it be granted that it has been of value in Europe as a compulsory system or at Plattsburg as a voluntary system, does it follow that it would be equally valuable in America as a compulsory system? Nothing seems more obvious than that it has been the necessity, the sense of necessity, underlying the system in Europe, rather than the system itself which have given the results of which we hear so much. When a people like the Swiss, surrounded and hemmed in by undetermined forces, gathers itself together for the common defense, it may well be that every individual spirit feeling the common danger, the common dread, yields itself up to it. And we have often been told that in the German schools and the German industries there is the same dominating pressure from a national impulse which leads and controls the individual as appears in the discipline of the army. We have heard it said that the German schoolmaster has drilled the nation quite as effectively as has the army officer. And on the negative side, the evidence is equally convincing. Whence comes the efficiency of the English navy? Every one deplores the individualism of the Briton, his refusal to submit to restraint and domination to which has been attributed his lack of an army. But he has had a navy, a navy which is perhaps the most successful weapon in the present war. And why has he had it and kept it so well? Simply because he has seen and felt the need of it, so that men have been willing to pay and to serve for the

common cause. And in our own country we have not always found the connection between military establishments and military virtues a constant one. We have had pension scandals, and we are not sure that army expeditions have always been wisely made. Why is it? Simply because our hearts have not been in it. Rightly or wrongly, we have not felt the importance of military provisions, and so we have neglected them and have allowed to grow up briers as well as virtues in the military patch.

And again it would be very unfortunate if we should argue from the values of voluntary military service to the same values in compulsory service. A goodly number of our young men, inspired with enthusiasm for a cause, have taken the training of summer camps. And there can be no doubt that they have learned many valuable lessons (though I gather that the science of logic is not included in the curriculum). Any man who gives himself heart and soul and body to a cause will develop strength and loyalty and endurance. But it does not follow that he who does the same task unwillingly, whether lazily or because sober judgment condemns the work, will secure the same advantage. And the essential weakness of the proposal of compulsory military training is just this—that it hopes to train our young men by compelling them to do something which the sober common sense of our people does not yet think it necessary to have done. Quite apart from the desirability of such a venture, whether in itself one approves it or not, as a piece of practical school teaching, it seems to me inevitably doomed to failure. The argument for it is based on false analogies. The virtues it seeks are well worth seeking, but the road suggested would not, I think, lead to them, but rather to national disappointment and regret.

Ever since William James began the search for the Moral Equivalent of War we have been seeking some activity which would fuse us together as a people just as the peoples of Europe are now become living flames of fury and zeal. "How," we have been asking, "shall we keep the virtues of the tiger, but let the tiger die?" And to this question one person may give one answer and another another, without noting a certain

fallacy in the question itself. Is it not the plain truth that you can not have the virtues of the tiger unless you are the tiger, do as he does, feel as he feels, live as he lives? And it is my impression that most of these proposals for the integration of our national life are at this point begging the question. "How shall we achieve the unity of a European nation; by what machinery shall it be done?" It may be that it is not to be done at all, that it is a unity which we do not desire or at least for which we are not willing to pay the price which is demanded. We have not as a people lived in relations of attack and defense, of fear and hostility, with our neighbors. And if we are not to come into such relations we shall not develop the virtues which grow from them. But we have great tasks before us—the tasks of a nation's inner life, and here it is that our virtues as we develop them are to be found. I do not believe that by any great miracle this people is to be integrated, is to be fused into a single Will. A war might do it but we hope that we shall not have a war. But lacking that we must win our unity not by some miracle of will, but by growing understanding of each other, by growing consideration for our fellow citizens.

It seems to me that our hope lies not so much in the growth of a Will as in the development of a Mind, so that by our understanding of each other we shall learn to will together. We are suffering, I think, from volitionism—the notion that if only you desire to do something and try to do it, you will find, first, that you can do it, and second, that it is worth doing. Against that volitionism, for the sake of balance, our schools and colleges must oppose intellectualism, the eagerness to know and to understand so that the right things rather than the wrong may be done.